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HOSPITAL AND TRAINING SCHOOL ADMINISTRATION

IN CHARGE OF
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HOSPITAL WASTE
BY LAURA A. WILSON, R.N.

If the admirable suggestions now being issued by Mr. Hoover and other government officials had come earlier and had been followed, there would be less necessity for the consideration of waste, but many institutions have never had any system of finding out where actual waste exists or, if it is known, have not instituted any reforms to eliminate it.

Perhaps the most formidable element that confronts hospital authorities today is that of rising costs. These questions naturally present themselves: How do costs grow? And how may they be reduced? In order to answer these questions, an analysis must be made of the hospital as a whole and of each department, to find the cost of maintenance. It will also be necessary to find out if waste is one of the factors in the increase of costs.

Before discussing the waste which is so plainly visible to the naked eye, it might be well to consider some of the avenues through which waste constantly stalks unmolested.

Do many people ever take account of the *time* wasted, in even the best institutions? Imagination readily hears the bard of older days make his comparison today between the theft of money and time, rather than between money and character, and this is not because character is less valuable now, but because time (the needful space for action) is a rare constituent of the average man or woman's twenty-four-hour day and because there is generally a clearer appreciation of the fact that "time gone can never be regained."

When the busy hospital superintendent is interrupted in her legitimate work by the incidental caller with time on his hands that are unused to service, the waste is apt to be greivous.

When a whole group of people is kept waiting in the operating room for the chief surgeon, who fails to appear at the appointed hour, the waste of time and the drain upon the nervous energy of that group are greater than they would have been had the task been performed at the proper time.

The telephone has grown so important to modern life and the conduct of its affairs that one might almost say it is an essential element, but when one reaches the telephone from a remote part of the hospital to reply to a question whose answer should have been self-evident or at

least obtainable from any subordinate, one craves a life without telephones and deplores the waste of time.

Almost any waste of time is a very real and definite waste of money as, for instance, a dollar's worth of time spent in mending a fifty-cent garment is a waste; a highly paid employe engaged in doing the work of an unskilled workman is a waste and is exemplified when an officer of the institution substitutes for the telephone operator.

Waste is caused by time spent in traveling long distances to remote parts of the institution for supplies that should be kept nearer to the working base and could be easily so arranged by a little forethought and enterprise.

Again, are the various hospital duties performed more slowly than the average pace? Is time wasted in this manner? Do the nurses walk around the bed six times in making it, when four times would accomplish the task? It does not require a certified accountant to discover the waste in money by such procedures. More nurses and more employees are required, with a consequent outlay of more money for salaries and maintenance of the workers, not to mention the waste of good nervous energy and of good nurses by the poor training thus encouraged.

Possibly the present shortage of labor may prove somewhat of a blessing, in that employers and institutions are obliged to give more attention to detail in considering how more may be accomplished without increasing the number of laborers and the wear and tear upon them. Doubtless many hospital superintendents have been surprised at the ease with which some problems have almost solved themselves during these last strenuous months. Problems that seem impossible in the darkness of the night at the end of a tired day, disappear or become easily adjustable in the light of day. Thought, computation, and concentration upon the forms of waste in hospitals are the first steps toward a betterment of conditions, but the superintendent cannot stop there, she must press on to great activity in making her corrections. Her knowledge of human nature and the affairs of the world will soon tell her whether she is on the right course. Her institution will scarcely benefit by shifting the waste from one department to another, it must be eliminated and not transferred.

Following the waste of time and labor, should be mentioned that of material, which includes all sorts of supplies, but especially, in these war times, foods and surgical supplies.

There are many ways of wasting foods without knowledge of so doing. The most flagrant errors are made when too much is served the patients at one time. This condition arises when nurses, attendants, and others hope to save time and steps by forestalling the possibility of more than one small portion being required, and heaping the platter to "make sure and have enough. As a rule, more than the surplus is wasted, because

by having too much, the patient is unable to eat any. The same habits and procedures may be traced to any department of the hospital where people are fed.

Surgical supplies meet the same fate as the foods, but the waste is less easily controlled, because the conscience of the users cannot always be reached by appeals from the hospital administration whose deference for physicians and surgeons has always forbidden a "why or a wherefore" when excessive demands of any kind are made. With the conspicuous changes being made so rapidly by time and "the times," that condition is bound to pass.

Waste by unproductive effort, means loss in both time and material and is due to inefficiency. This brings us to the consideration of the human element, the most important factor, upon which all others depend.

If a chief executive is to be chosen, let her possess, with all the other qualities that will be demanded in her, those of good nature and a saving sense of humor. Upon her will largely depend the psychology of the hospital, the homeliness, the refinement, and the well-oiled machinery, invisible, noiseless, and efficient. Such a person should draw about herself a staff that will understand her ideals and coöperate with her in the administration of the hospital in as skilful and as economical a manner as possible.

If at specified times the heads of the departments should meet with the chief executive would not the results probably be these? All would have a knowledge of the needs of the hospital, also of its problems, and the combined knowledge and enthusiasm of the group would be applied to solving them. Would not new ideas be originated and, if adopted, track could be kept of their progress? Would not fewer errors be made in administration if discussion should precede action? Would not the other workers feel the spirit of this organization, whose efforts are entirely for the good of the hospital, and be inspired to give more helpful coöperation, especially in the elimination of waste?

The hospital should buy carefully and intelligently and endeavor by every means to prevent waste within its jurisdiction, but it will probably suffer from rising costs of the articles required until the manufacturers, the wholesalers, the middlemen, and the retailers come to an adjustment fair to all.